DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 471 RC 015 961

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TITLE National Rural Education Association Research Agenda Report. October 1986.
INSTITUTION National Rural Education Association, Fort Collins, CO.
PUB DATE Oct 86
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Finance; Educational Policy; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Needs Assessment; Policy Formation; *Research Needs; Research Utilization; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; *School Effectiveness; Small Schools; *Superintendents; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Rural Education Association

ABSTRACT

To obtain rural school superintendents' assessment of research needs, questionnaires were sent in 1986 to 752 superintendents from schools with less than 1,000 K-12 student population. The questionnaires, adapted from the research agenda of the Rural Education Association (REA), consisted of 51 research topics grouped under 9 thematic categories. For each topic superintendents were asked: how useful would research data on this item be for you right now, and would you be willing to participate in a research project to collect data on this item? The 180 respondents rated most useful those research topics in the categories of rural school effectiveness and rural school finance. They were most willing to participate in school effectiveness research. At the bottom of the list for both usefulness and willingness to participate were those research topics related to a taxonomy of rural education. Rural superintendents seemed most interested in research that would help them survive financially and do a good job of educating rural youth. Unlike rural academicians, they were not interested in defining, classifying, or locating rural schools. This project identified a list of potential participants for research projects whose names will be on file with the REA. (JHZ)

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RESEARCH AGENDA REPORT OCTOBER 1986

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During February, 1986, the Rural Education Association Research Agenda was adapted to a questionnaire. The nine clusters with fifty-one total items were used to ask

> How useful would research data on this item be for you right now?
>
> and
>
> Would you be willing to participate in a research project to collect data on this item? (See Appendix I)

Questionnaires were sent to 752 school superintendents from schools with less than 1,000 K-12 student populations. One hundred eighty responses were returned. Of the 180, 57 percent of the respondents had class sizes of less than 25. Sixty percent of the respondents reported that the school was located in a city of less than 1,000. One hundred fifty of the respondents were from K-12 districts of which 98 percent were more than 20 miles from a city of 50,000 or more and 36 were over 90 miles away.

The top five items in the column "how useful would research data on this item be to you right now?" were:

1. Strategies which capitalize on the strengths of small schools and seek to correct the deficiencies. (2.694) (2.476)*

2. Strategies to stabilize revenue while operating on a small tax base. (2.615) (2.422)

3. Successful practices/programs in rural schools at both the elementary and secondary level that can be replicated. (2.604) (2.429)

4. Creation of new revenue sources and alternatiev funding formulas for rural schools. (2.589) (2.400)

5. Characteristics of effective rural schools (as viewed from both elementary and secondary perspectives.) (2.546) (2.499)

*The first number represents the mean for the "useful" question and the second number represents the mean for the "willingness to participate" question for this section. They were rated on a scale from 1 to 3.

The bottom five items for the question on usefulness were:

1. Determine where America's rural schools are located. (1.553) (1.726)

2. Determine what constitutes a rural school. (1.604) (1.692)

3. Identify definitions of rural, remote, isolated and small schools at national, regional, state and local levels. (1.654) (1.745)

4. Classification of rural schools by (a) size, (b) geographic region, (c) degree of remoteness and/or isolation, (d) etc. (1.682) (1.745)

5. Demographic make-up of students who attend rural schools. (1.764) (1.753)

The top five items in the column "would you be willing to participate in a research project to collect data on this item?" were:

1. Characteristics of effective rural schools (as viewed from elementary and secondary perspectives). (2.497) (2.546)*

2. Assessment of student achievement in rural schools. (2.479) (2.404)

3. Strategies which capitalize on the strengths of small schools and seek to correct deficiences. (2.476) (2.694)

4. Characteristics of effective leadership in rural schools (as viewed from both elementary and secondary perspectives). (2.430) (2.426)

5. Successful practices/programs in rural schools at both the elementary and secondary level that can be replicated. (2.429) (2.604)

*The first number represents the mean for the "willingness to participate" question, while the second number represents the mean for the "useful" question for this section.

The bottom five items for the "willingness to participate" question were:

1. Classification of rural schools by (a) size, (b) geographic region, (c) degree of remoteness and/or isolation, (d) etc. (1.524) (1.682)

2. Determine what constitutes a rural school. (1.692) (1.604)

3. Determine where America's rural schools are located. (1.726) (1.553)

4. Identify definitions of rural, remote, isolated and small schools at national, regional, state and local levels. (1.745) (1.654)

5. Demographic make-up of students who attend rural schools. (1.764) (1.753)

The first purpose of the study was to determine the high priority items as perceived by superintendents of small schools. Another purpose was to build a list of school districts willing to participate in the research. There has been no differentiation in the data by region and although one program would

have differentiated by size (under 25 per class), there was no difference in the results.

The research was conducted by Keigh Hubel and Bruce Barker. The computer program used was the Statistical Package for the Social Studies.

As clusters of items, Rural School Effectiveness and Rural Finance were of the highest priority with the Taxonomy of Rural Education cluster as the lowest priority. All of the lowest scores fell into this cluster, with both the location and the definitions of what constitutes a rural school heading the list of low priority items.

What This Means

1.0 To R.E.A. -

1.1 The Research Committee should encourage research projects which would meet a felt need by superintendents.

1.2 The R.E.A. may want to ignore the energy going into the definition of what a rural school is and where they are located. Evidently superintendents know where they are and whether they are rural. The great debate is probably more interesting for national politicians and rural academicians.

1.3 The Research Award can be given to those who satisfy high priority needs.

1.4 There is a list of potential participants for research projects. Their names are on file with Keigh Hubel.

2.0 To Washington -

2.1 There is a clear message from both Doris Helge's research and this project that small school effectiveness is a high priority item. It would seem clear that criteria used in A Nation At Risk and the National School Recognition Program need to be broadened to include items that are favorable to rural schools. Either that or come up with definitive evidence that the criteria listed are without a doubt the most important characteristics of schools.

2.2 It may be propitious to spend less time defining rural schools.

3.0 To states -

3.1 Finance formulas which are relatively stable and reflect new revenue sources are two high priority items that fall under state responsibility.

3.2 State Education Departments, area agencies, and institutions of higher learning should begin to collect research data on a state and regional basis.

4.0 To researchers -

4.1 Two major questions seem to emerge from the questionnaire--are we doing a good job of educating young people? and how can we survive financially?

4.2 The R.E.A. has a bank of willing participants.

School Statistics

1. Random sample of schools of less than 1,000 from all over the U.S.: 646

2. 57 percent respondents with class size under 25:

25 - 50	32%	(57)
50 - 100	11%	(21)
Other		(102)
Total		180

3.

K-12 Districts	150
K-6	5
K-8	17
9-12	2
Other	6
Total	180

4. Square Miles

0 - 100	63
101 - 200	42
201 - 300	27
301 - 500	21
500 +	15

5. Populations

Under 500	35%
500 - 1000	25%
1000 - 1500	16%
1500 - 2000	9%
2000 - 2500	9%
Over 2500	6%

Rural Education Association
Research Agenda Questionnaire
Statements and Means

The first number after each statement represent the mean for the question "how useful would research data on this item be for you right now?" The second number represents the mean for the question "would you be willing to participate in a research project to collect data on this item?" The statements were rated on a scale from 1 to 3, with 1 being most negative and 3 being most positive.

Rural School Effectiveness

1. Assessment of student achievement in rural schools. (2.404) (2.479)
2. Characteristics of effective rural schools (as viewed from both elementary and secondary perspectives). (2.546) (2.497)
3. Characteristics of effective leadership in rural schools (as viewed from both elementary and secondary perspectives). (2.426) (2.430)
4. Strategies which capitalize on the strengths of small schools and seek to correct deficiencies. (2.694) (2.476)
5. Successful practices/programs in rural schools at both the elementary and secondary level that can be replicated. (2.604) (2.429)
6. Strategies to meet the needs of special populations in rural areas (e.g., minorities, special education, etc.). (1.973) (1.976)

Staff Development and Professional Support

7. Strategies for the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel. (2.055) (2.043)
8. The development of staff inservice training programs to meet the needs of rural teachers. (2.396) (2.273)
9. Determine how technology can best be used as a means of conducting useful staff inservice. (2.132) (2.117)
10. Identify and develop preservice training needs of prospective rural teachers (e.g., mutiple certification, alternative training models, field based experience, etc.). (2.236) (2.068)
11. Assess needs of administrators and support staff in dealing with problems such as professional isolation, limited staffing, professional development, curriculum development, etc. (2.231) (2.177)

Curriculum and Instruction

12. Successful methodologies and practices which increase the effectiveness of the instructional program and student learning in small and/or multi-grade classrooms. (2.497) (2.317)
13. Curricular needs in rural schools which enhance rural development as well as meet the needs of those students who plan to leave the rural community and those who elect to stay. (2.306) (2.184)

14. Advancing technologies as a way to improve content and breadth of instruction for basic, special, and vocational education. (2.264) (2.297)
15. Strategies which enhance and broaden curricular offerings in small high schools. (2.367) (2.211)

Taxonomy of Rural Education

16. Determine what constitutes a rural school. (1.604) (1.692)
17. Characteristics of rural schools as perceived at national, regional, state, and local levels. (1.858) (1.855)
18. Classification of rural schools by (a) size, (b) geographic region, (c) degree of remoteness and/or isolation, (d) etc. (1.682) (1.524)
19. Demographic make-up of students who attend rural schools. (1.753) (1.764)
20. Determine where America's rural school are located. (1.553) (1.726)
21. Identify definitions of rural, remote, isolated and small schools at national, regional, state, and local levels. (1.654) (1.745)
22. Defferences between rural and urban schools. (1.871) (1.866)

Federal, State and Local Policies Impacting Rural Schools and Communities

23. Analysis of federal legislation and education policies on rural schools. (2.236) (2.102)
24. Analysis of state legislation and policies on rural schools. (2.324) (2.194)
25. Impact of educational reform movements, blue ribbon commissions, etc. (federal, state, and local) on rural schools. (2.127) (2.013)
26. Strategies to increase awareness for rural education within state offices of education. (2.326) (2.233)

Rural School Finance

27. Strategies to stabilize revenue while operating on a small tax base. (2.615) (2.422)
28. Distribution, utilization, and effects of federal and state education funds in rural schools and districts. (2.392) (2.252)
29. Ways to equalize salary levels and other employment benefits for rural teachers in comparison to salary and benefits awarded urban teachers. (2.527) (2.338)
30. Financial implications of major enrollment shifts in rural schools. (2.078) (2.006)
31. Politics of school finance in rural communities. (2.200) (2.093)
32. Creation of new revenue sources and alternative funding formulas for rural schools. (2.589) (2.400)
33. Assess economic impact to rural schools of changes in the agriculture community (e.g., decreased farm property evaluation, setbacks in agriculture production, etc.). (2.318) (2.166)

School District Governance and Organization

34. Effects of consolidation on rural schools, rural children, and rural communities. (2.442) (2.308)
35. Determine the economic, educational, and social effects of class, school, and district size and structure in rural communities. (2.222) (2.019)
36. Evaluation of the role and/or contribution of educational service centers in rural areas. (2.188) (2.006)
37. Organizational implications of major enrollment shifts in rural schools. (1.884) (1.841)
38. Politics of school and district organization in rural America. (1.883) (1.874)
39. Alternatives to school district consolidation. (2.390) (2.217)
40. Strategies to improve efficiency in organization and administration of rural schools. (2.472) (2.3440
41. Determine ways to promote parent and community involvement in the education process of rural youngsters. (2.354) (2.216)

Assessment of Rural School Assumptions

42. Support for claims that rural schools are superior because of individualized instruction, greater community involvement, local control, etc. (2.533) (2.335)
43. Assess strengths and weaknesses commonly associated with rural schools. (2.544) (2.369)
44. The role of the community and its effects on rural education. (2.341) (2.244)
45. Assessment of the rural school, community, and family in meeting the socialization needs of rural youth. (2.350) (2.209)

Role of the School in Rural Development

46. Economic impact of school closure on the rural community. (2.357) (2.133)
47. The school's role in helping to facilitate manpower needs in the rural community. (2.106) (1.981)
48. The school as an economic muliplier in the area. (2.244) (2.108)
49. Use of the school facility for purposes other than education of young people. (2.319) (2.196)
50. Position and significance of the school in shaping the image of the rural community. (2.308) (2.184)
51. Use of the school as a mechanism to promote rural development. (2.139) (2.083)